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## NEW ACCESSIONS IN THE CLASSICAL DEPARTMENT

## III. THE BRONZE PANTHER

**A**N especially interesting bronze among the recent accessions is the small figure of a female panther. The dimensions of the figure and of the base, which was found with it, are as follows: length of panther,  $9\frac{3}{8}$  inches (.237 m.), base  $10 \times 6\frac{7}{8}$  inches (.254 x .174 m.). The color of the patina is blackish green, with traces of reddish and green oxidation. When found the surface was badly corroded, but it has been successfully cleaned by M. André in Paris. The figure is complete except for the end of the tail. We have here an excellent example of the naturalness and realism to which ancient art could attain. The animal is represented lying on one side, her left fore

and hind legs raised in the air, her head lifted and turned a little to one side. The mouth is open; the ears are laid back. It is not clear whether she is turning around in playful attitude or whether she is wounded. Her face seems to suggest that she is in pain; but there is no trace of a wound. The whole body, the head, the paws, and the tail, are covered with spots which are inlaid with silver. The inlay has partly disappeared, but the remaining traces show that the spots were within three-eighths of an inch of one another and were of different forms, some being round, some oblong, and some crescent-shaped. The pose of the animal, as well as every detail in the modeling were copied strictly from life without any of the convention-

alism of Greek Art in the treatment of animals. The wonderful way in which the cat-like nature of the beast is displayed in the grinning face, the uplifted paws, and the long, lithe body with its many curves and hollows makes this figure a triumph of animal portraiture. It may well rival the works of the great modern student of animal life, A. L. Barye.

The extraordinary realism of the piece is one of the characteristics of the Hellenistic period (third to first centuries B. C.), when the ambition of the artist was no longer to transcend nature, but to

copy her faithfully in her manifold phases and moods. The actual workmanship, however, is probably Roman, of early Imperial date, since the figure is said to have been found in Rome, when digging for the foundations of the English church in the Via Babuino, in a deposit



FIG. 1. BRONZE STATUETTE OF A PANTHER

of Roman bronzes discovered there in 1880. It therefore comes from the same place as the bronzes published in the *Bullettino Comunale*, 1881, p. 30 (chiefly Roman heads), a statuette of Dionysos in the Dutuit Collection (*Catalogue*, vol. II.), and a panther in Baron Edward de Rothschild's collection, published in *Monuments Piot IV.*, p. 105, by S. Reinach.\* M. de Rothschild's panther is represented seated, with the left paw raised. In technique it is similar to ours. It shows the same skilful modeling, and is likewise inlaid with silver. M. Reinach has tried, not convincingly, to combine it and the Dutuit Dionysos in one group. Our

\* If that panther came from the same find, as asserted, M. Reinach is wrong in saying it was discovered in 1888. The date must be 1880.

panther is considerably smaller and therefore could not have formed part of that group. Whether it was complete in itself or belonged to a larger composition is an interesting question. The base on which it is at present placed is said to have been found with it, which is undoubtedly true, since both show the same oxidation, and moreover the base has marks indicating that at some time the panther rested on it. These marks, however, run not lengthwise, as might be expected, but across the width of the base. That such a position cannot have been that originally intended is clear, since only half of the panther would then be resting on the base, and the right fore paw, on which she is supporting her weight, would be in the air. However, it is easy to explain the present traces by supposing that in the burying the panther somehow became displaced from its original position. But there is a further difficulty: the panther, when placed lengthwise, does not entirely fit the base. The right fore-paw does not rest on it as it should, but is slightly lifted from the ground. Since there is no indication that the leg has been bent it would seem that a base of uneven surface, perhaps to represent a rocky ground, was originally made for the figure. The present base, being approximately the required size, may have been used later for it. But the fact that panther and base were evidently not made for each other leaves it an open question whether

other figures were originally associated with the panther. Nevertheless it is more probable that it was an independent composition, since there are plenty of analogies of panthers and other animals made as single figures (*see Reinach, Répertoire* II, pp. 710-778), while groups are comparatively rare.

The inlay work on the base is very beautiful. On the top around the curved part are two sprays of leaves and berries; the leaves are inlaid with silver; the stalk, the berries, and the ribbon at the end of each spray are inlaid with *niello* (an artificial substance of a black color produced by a mixture of silver, copper, and lead with sulphur and borax). The sprays do not meet in the centre; a small rosette is placed between them. The rounded side of the base is decorated with a series of triangles in *niello*, each of which

is surmounted by a silver lotos bud. The back of the base is left undecorated except for the ornamented moulding which runs around the entire bottom. The combination of the bright silver with the dark *niello* inlay against the rich golden color of the original bronze must have been very effective. This *niello* technique was not uncommon among the ancients. Pliny (*N. H.* XXXIII, 131) mentions it in connection with Egyptian silver vessels, and there are many extant examples of the Roman period, as well as a large silver vessel in St. Petersburg dating from the third century B. C.

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FIG. 2. BRONZE STATUETTE OF A PANTHER